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AUTHOR Fontaine, Sheryl I.
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ABSTRACT

A study examined the status of graduate studies in composition at the M.A. level. Open-ended surveys were sent to every M.A.-granting institution listed in "Petersen's Graduate Programs in the Humanities." One hundred eleven surveys were returned (a 39% response). Results indicated that: (1) the average M.A.-granting institution does not offer either a specialization or degree in composition, but does have some composition or rhetoric elective courses available; (2) the degree programs that do exist tend to have been established longer than programs that offer concentrations and tend to have more faculty who specialize in composition; (3) students in these programs were slightly more likely than not to have available either teaching assistantships, readerships, or writing tutor positions; and (4) students who graduate with M.A. degrees or concentrations in the discipline return to or procure teaching appointments at secondary schools or community colleges, seek admission into Ph.D. programs, or become professional writers. Results also indicated that all of the courses identified as central to doctoral programs in composition were also identified by the M.A. programs: composition theory, rhetoric, teaching writing, composition research, and linguistics. Findings suggest that few programs focus on the interdisciplinary, theory-based, socially grounded perceptions that characterize the profession. (One table of data is attached.) (RS)

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Sheryl I. Fontaine
California State University, Fullerton
1991 CCCC Boston, MA

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Sheryl I. Fontaine
California State University, Fullerton
1991 CCCC Boston, MA

M.A. PROGRAMS IN COMPOSITION: EXISTING COURSES OF STUDY

The nature of our graduate programs is powerfully connected to the theoretical and practical assumptions we hold about our discipline. Any particular set of program goals, graduate courses, and faculty profiles, is a concrete representation of our abstract beliefs about what it means to be a composition specialist, to study literacy, written language development, writing pedagogy, and the construction of written texts. Reciprocally, as composition becomes increasingly massive and diverse, the selections that we make about what to include in our graduate curricula shape the discipline by affecting students' perceptions, valorizing certain texts, and promoting particular viewpoints.

Given the important relationship between our graduate programs and the nature of the discipline, it is surprising that so few scholars have undertaken research to describe both theoretical models of such programs and actual, existing programs. Covino, Johnson, and Feehan, in 1980 and Chapman and Tate in 1987, used surveys to find out how universities were designing and implementing graduate studies in Rhetoric. The 1989 Modern Language Association publication The Future of Doctoral Studies in English, includes the Bettina Huber's report on a "1986 Survey of English Doctoral Programs in Writing and Literature," and essays by Andrea Lunsford and Janice Lauer and by Richard Lloyd-Jones which characterize graduate studies in composition in relation to Ph.D. programs in English. Taken together,

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these reports and essays offer a brief historical narrative of our changing conception of graduate studies in composition. More precisely, these essays offer a narrative about doctoral studies in composition; M.A. level programs are not mentioned. And although we might suppose that what is true of doctoral programs will be true of masters programs, we don't yet know this for a fact.

This morning, my co-presenters and I would like to examine the status of graduate studies in composition at the M.A. level, looking at some real programs and some theoretical models. As a path to making explicit the tacit assumptions supporting M.A. programs, I will draw a general profile, describing the number and nature of existing programs which offer either degrees or concentrations in composition. Rise Axelrod, with the assistance of several graduate students, will describe the M.A. degree program at California State University, San Bernadino, a program which tries to respond to the diverse and often conflicting needs of its students. Presenting Cherryl Armstrong's paper, Angus Dunstan will propose that the principles of teacher development advocated by the National Writing Project be used as guidelines to develop a model for M.A. studies which, unlike existing models, integrates teacher knowledge with university theory and research.

We conceive of our presentations as working toward a comprehensive examination of M.A. studies in composition and their place in graduate training. We do not expect to present a unified philosophy; in addition to sharing some views, we will most certainly also disagree about details of program design and the problematic relationship between disciplinary theory

and curricular practices. Through the provocative interaction of our consensus and disagreement with your own experiences and assumptions, we hope, by the end of our presentations, to have drawn you into our discussion.

This fall, with the financial support of my department, I mailed a survey to every M.A. granting institution listed in Petersen's Graduate Programs in the Humanities (245). The survey is a series of open-ended questions which asked respondents to tell me, first, whether their institutions grant M.A. degrees in composition, offer concentrations in the discipline, have composition courses available to complement English studies, or have no courses at all that they would designate as being about composition or rhetoric. Next, I asked how old the programs are, who is teaching their courses in composition and rhetoric, whether the programs have teaching assistantships, and what the graduates of their programs are doing. I also asked respondents to name all of their composition and rhetoric courses. The characterization of M.A. studies that I can give you today is shaped both by the completeness and accuracy of the responses and by my own interpretation of some of the narrative and descriptive responses that were included. I could have circumvented some of this subjectivity by giving respondents multiple choices rather than open-ended questions, I felt that the richness and detail resulting from open-ended questions would serve as a valuable introduction for our understanding of M.A. studies in the discipline.

Though I certainly would have liked a 100% return on my questionnaires, my actual return of 39% is not unanticipated given that

respondents had to take the time to write answers rather than just check multiple choices and that I haven't yet been able to make follow-up "reminder" telephone calls. I was able to increase the report rate to 45% of the schools queried by adding information about the California State University system that my colleague, Mary Kay Tirrell had collected and generously shared with me.

Of the 111 schools on which I have reports, 11% (12 schools) grant degrees in composition and rhetoric, 14% (15 schools) have no courses at all in composition or rhetoric, 22% (24 schools) offer concentrations, and 53% (60 schools) have one or more courses in composition and rhetoric available for students working toward their Master degrees in English. In other words, of the schools that responded to my survey, a small majority (53%) made available elective courses in composition to their English M.A. students; half as many schools (22%) have grouped their elective courses into a concentration within an English M.A.; half again as many schools (11%) report that they grant degrees in composition and rhetoric; and slightly more than this (14%) offer no graduate level composition courses at all.

The graduate programs with M.A. degrees in composition tend to be older and have more composition faculty than those programs with concentrations: Schools that grant M.A. degrees in composition have done so for an average of 7 years and currently have an average of 5 faculty members with specializations in the field. Programs with M.A. concentrations in composition are an average of 4 1/2 years old and employ an average of 2 specially-trained faculty.

67% of the schools report having either teaching assistantships, readerships, or tutoring positions available on a competitive basis to their masters students. Of the 13% of the schools which reported having no such employment, two grant degrees in composition and the rest offer composition electives to their English students. 20% of the schools I surveyed did not respond to this question.

The respondents who were able to report on the post-graduation professional lives of their students who have received M.A.'s in composition or in English with concentrations in composition, 90% included in their lists advanced study in Ph.D. programs and 82% included teaching in high schools, community colleges, and four year colleges. 2% added technical writing; 1% included professional writing, and less than 1% believe that "terminal" M.A. degrees are worthless.

I have compiled two lists, each with over 50 titles of graduate courses in composition and rhetoric that are offered by schools with degrees and schools with concentrations in composition. Rather than enumerating all of these courses, I will list only the most frequently occurring ones. Having first grouped those courses whose titles seem comparable (Composition Theory, Theories of Composition; Research Methods, Methods of Composition Research), I then identified those which appeared on the lists of more than two schools. Schools which grant Masters degrees in composition demonstrated much less agreement about what should be offered than did schools with concentrations. Of the 53 courses named, only four appeared on more than two lists:

1.) Research (5)

2.) Teaching Composition (4)

3.) Teaching Basic Skills (4)

4.) Linguistics (3)

Schools with a concentration in composition collectively named 71 courses; seven of these were named by more than two institutions:

1.) Teaching Composition (11)

2.) Theories in Rhetoric and Composition (10)

3.) Rhetorical Theory (7)

4.) Research (6)

5.) History of Rhetoric (5)

6.) Linguistics (5)

7.) College English Teaching (3)

As a way to make all of these numbers easier to understand, let me condense them into a general profile: The average M.A. granting institution that responded to my survey does not offer either a specialization or degree in composition, but does have some composition or rhetoric elective courses available. The degree programs that do exist tend, on the average, to have been established longer than programs that offer concentrations (7 as compared to 4 1/2 years) and also tend to have more faculty who specialize in composition (5 as compared to 2). Students in these programs are slightly more likely than not to have available either teaching assistantships, readerships, or writing tutor positions. And the students who graduate with M.A. degrees or concentrations in the discipline return to or procure teaching appointments at secondary schools

or community colleges, seek admission into Ph.D. programs, or become professional writers.

If we first consider the degree and concentration programs separately, we see a fairly clear difference in their predominant courses. The reporting schools agree less about what courses should be required for a Masters degree in composition than on what courses should constitute a concentration in composition. Four courses were listed in the course offerings of more than of the two schools that grant degrees in composition. The most frequently named course was Research, but courses in Teaching and Linguistics were close behind. Programs in which students could seek concentrations in composition while earning a degree in English commonly named seven courses, and Teaching, Theories in Rhetoric and Composition, Rhetorical Theory, and Research were all named with greater frequency than any of those named by the reporting degree programs.

If we now consider degree and concentration programs jointly, as representatives of a global perception of M.A. studies in the discipline, we find that the courses which are most common and apparently considered the most relevant to M.A. study in composition are Research, Teaching (Basic Writing and general Composition), Linguistics, Theory of Composition, Rhetorical Theory, and History of Rhetoric.

Let's return to the studies of doctoral programs in composition that I mentioned earlier to see whether the similarity they imply between Ph.D. and M.A. studies in composition is indeed warranted. In 1987 the average Ph.D. program in Rhetoric was seven years old and employed two or three specialists--making those programs a bit older and a bit larger than M.A.

programs in composition in 1991.

Covino, Johnson, and Feehan's 1980 study of graduate programs in rhetoric ranked courses in Rhetoric, Linguistics, and Written Discourse as most appropriate for training students in composition. The 1989 MLA study compiled a list of courses required by more than half the doctoral Rhetoric programs in their survey. Their list included Theory of Composition, Rhetoric, Teaching, Linguistics, and Research. The results of these studies indicates that the most frequently offered and, by implication, the most appropriate courses for doctoral composition programs are Rhetoric and Linguistics.

But we might want to extend this list in light of the changes that have taken place in the decade since Covino, Johnson, and Feehan's study. During this time the discipline has "grown into its own." Many scholars have taken on the job of shaping and defining composition apart from and in relation to its historical ancestor, Rhetoric and its academic cousin, Linguistics. This work directly contributes to the rise of courses like those listed in the MLA study--Composition Theory, Research, and Pedagogy--courses that define us as a discipline.

Although slightly different in age and size (And we probably would have predicted both of these differences.), Ph.D. and M.A. programs in composition share their curricular designs. All of the courses identified as central to doctoral programs in composition were also identified by the M.A. programs: Composition Theory, Rhetoric, Teaching Writing, Composition Research, and Linguistics. But what can we learn from these specific course names about our general perception of graduate studies in

composition?

In an essay that my colleague Cherryl Armstrong and I wrote, "The Power of Naming: Names that Create and Define the Discipline," we describe the tremendous psychological and social impact that the names of our courses and programs have on shaping ours and others' perceptions of the discipline. "By naming something, [we] actively [carve] out a space for it to occupy, a space defined by what [we value] . . . Once chosen, a name suggests permanence, as if it could lay a claim upon the true nature of an object" (8). And so our course names carry with them powerful and seemingly permanent connotations about what is valuable to the discipline. The inherent power of naming becomes most apparent in our departments during the negotiations that occur when we propose new course and program names or revisions of old ones. These negotiations occur "not only over the names themselves, but over the perceptual alterations that ensue" (9). Certainly Chapman and Tate significantly underestimate the importance of our course names when they claim that "[c]hanges in course titles, and even the addition of new graduate seminars, can be merely cosmetic." For our students, these course titles, as they are listed in institutional catalogs and on official transcripts, precede us into the classroom and remain forever attached to our courses, shaping present and future perceptions of composition.

Rather than asking what perceptions might be suggested by the course names that most frequently occur in our graduate programs, I will first consider three different descriptions of graduate study in composition. We can then see how the desired perceptions of the discipline implied by these

descriptions are similar to the actual perception created by the course names.

In 1977 John Gerber encouraged graduate students "to make writing, the theories of writing, and the theories of teaching writing an area of specialization" (316). In their study conducted three years after Gerber made his recommendation, Covino, Johnson, and Feehan base their conception of graduate study in composition solely on teaching, explaining that they will "gather information about what constitutes an effective curriculum for producing **competent writing teachers** (emphasis added)" (390). Most recently, Andrea Lunsford and Janice Lauer describe graduate studies in rhetoric this way:

> "Conceived as the systematic study of the production and interpretation of all kinds of texts in their varying contexts, the field of rhetoric and composition contributes to English studies by integrating reading and writing, by establishing interdisciplinary frameworks, by broadening our textual base, and by viewing pedagogy as an enactment of theory. In addition, the field provides English studies with an opportunity to enter into and affect public policy debates and discussions about the way English is taught and assessed at all levels, about issues of literacy in general, and about the relation of literacy to particular social, political, and ideological agendas" (110).

Which of these descriptions of graduate studies in composition is most closely reflected in the names of the courses that are central to our graduate programs: Composition Theory, Rhetoric, Teaching Writing, Composition Research, and Linguistics? We certainly don't hear in these names the concern for public policy, assessment, literacy, and social, political, and ideological agendas that Lunsford and Lauer raise. These course names come much closer to the benign, content-descriptive interests of Gerber and Covino, Johnson, and Feehan. Given that nearly all of the

graduate students who enter our M.A. programs and many of those who come to our Ph.D. programs have no background in the discipline and will be "required to learn the language and procedures of a new discipline," (Lauer 26), such a straight forward, content-based perception of the discipline may indeed be an appropriate one to give our students.

But this perception doesn't seem consistent with what is happening in the discipline itself. Rather, it is the interdisciplinary, theory-based, socially-grounded perception described by Lunsford and Lauer that comes closest to what is being talked about in our journals and at our conferences.

It would be wrong of me to suggest that there are no schools conveying this perception of the discipline to their students. Over the years, I have heard about such programs from colleagues and read about them in brochures and articles. But based on the available surveys of doctoral programs and my own survey of M.A. granting institutions, it would seem that many schools are not designing curricula consistent with the perception of the discipline that most of us have. In the forefront of curricular design are traditional, relatively uncomplicated courses whose goal is to lay out the content of the discipline.

But in the background, there are other courses. Listen to the other course list compiled from my study, the list of individual course names from individual M.A. programs: Tutoring, Classroom Research in English, Internship in Teaching at the Junior College, Internship in Teaching at the Workplace, Development of Standard English, Gateway Writing Project, Reading and Writing in Interpretive Communities, Interpreting and

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Responding to Student Writing, Classroom Research in English, Language Bias, Writing for Teachers, Writing in Multicultural Settings, Theory and Background in Community College And College Reading Instruction, Literacy in the Classroom Community, Mentoring in Classroom Settings, Theories and Practices of Bilingual Education, Contemporary Urban Problems. These titles conjure a very different perception of the discipline from the one suggested by the initial list of course titles. In this perception the context of our teaching is as important as its content, the politics of writing are as important as its structure, and the community of writers is as influential as the writing task.

I will conclude my remarks by admitting that in the process of writing this essay I too had to confront my own perception of the discipline, knowing that the way I "narrated" the data would, in turn, influence your perceptions. You may have noticed that I chose "composition" rather than "rhetoric" or "writing" to name the kind of programs I profiled, a choice that carries with it its own or "semantic web" or set of connotations. At Cal State Fullerton, where I teach, we are beginning to think about how to integrate composition courses more fully into the graduate curriculum. And even in our early discussions I have heard some colleagues refer to the potential program as **Rhetoric**, others used the name **Writing**, one recently suggested **Teaching**. Whatever we decide about the future of graduate studies at Fullerton--and in the discipline-at-large--I hope that it will be based on an honest examination of the perceptions created by our courses and programs and a careful reflection about our perceptions of the discipline.

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Sheryl I. Fontaine
Department of English and Comparative Literature
California State University, Fullerton
Fullerton, CA 92634-4080

M.A. Programs in Composition: Existing Courses of Study

N=111 M.A. granting institutions (45% return)

KINDS OF PROGRAMS:

M.A. degrees in composition	11% (12 schools)
No courses in composition	14% (15 schools)
Concentrations in composition	22% (24 schools)
Courses available in composition	53% (60 schools)

AVERAGE AGE OF PROGRAMS AND NUMBER OF COMPOSITION FACULTY:

M.A. degrees in composition	7 years old//5 faculty
Concentration in composition	4.5 years old//2 faculty

SCHOOLS WITH TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS, READERSHIPS, TUTORING POSITIONS:

Have all three	67%
Have none	13%
Did not report	20%

PROFESSIONS INCLUDED ON LIST TO DESCRIBE GRADUATES:

Advanced study in Ph.D. programs	90%
Teaching (high school, community college, four year college)	82%
Technical writing	2%
Professional writing	1%

COURSES WHICH OCCURRED ON LISTS OF MORE THAN TWO SCHOOLS:

Schools with Masters degrees in composition:

1.) Research (5)
2.) Teaching Composition (4)
3.) Teaching Basic Skills (4)
4.) Linguistics (3)

Schools with concentrations in composition:

1.) Teaching Composition (11)
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